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Regents Award Funding To Twelve Distance Learning Projects Statewide

BATON ROUGE - The Louisiana Board of Regents has awarded \$509,000 for Distance Education Initiative (DEI) grants for 2002-2003. The awards mark the fifth year of the DEI grant program, instituted by the Board of Regents to enhance distance learning opportunities and offerings at institutions across the state. The twelve approved proposals were selected from among thirty submitted for consideration.

"The DEI grant program has been instrumental in the proliferation and success of Louisiana's electronic campus," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joe Savoie. "Because of the increasing variety, flexibility and availability of electronically-delivered degree programs and course offerings in recent years, we've seen the enrollment in these programs statewide grow to more than 13,000 students per semester, accessing some 700 courses. Many of these students would not have been able to take advantage of Louisiana's higher education system without the electronic campus. It's an excellent example of the kinds of things Louisiana is doing to improve access to higher education."

The Louisiana Legislature funded the multi-year DEI program in 1998-99. Initial phases of the effort included installation of high-grade compressed video capability and internet access at public institutions across the state, as well as fostering a solid faculty knowledge base and effective technical support. Since then, the program has focused on promoting the development of collaborative, program-specific offerings. As a result, inter-campus partnerships have been forged, allowing efficient resource utilization and increased access to online offerings, particularly in rural areas. There are currently 13 complete degree programs available through Louisiana's electronic campus. Since 1998, some 76,000 Louisiana students have taken advantage of electronically-delivered courses. Growing participation by the Louisiana Community and Technical College System and the K-12 school system is further increasing the numbers of potential users and programs.

DEI programs run the gamut of disciplines and emphases. Among previously-funded DEI programs now in successful operation, for example, is the Louisiana Fire Science Collaborative Educational Initiative (which was approved once again for funding for 2002-2003). This online collaboration between LSU-Eunice and the LSU Fire and Emergency Training Institute in Baton Rouge

is being implemented in response to the critical need for affordable, high-quality fire science training, especially for fire departments in small or rural communities, which often can not afford to send their personnel off for training on-site at the two campuses.

The program is aimed at 1) converting existing fire science academic courses statewide to the National Fire Administration (NFA) standards 2) electronic delivery of those standardized courses to fire science students statewide, and 3) coordinating training and certification for program faculty.

“The Louisiana Collaborative Fire Science Initiative is a wonderful opportunity for Louisiana that would not have been possible without Regents funding,” said Noah James West, Fire Science Coordinator at LSU-Eunice. “The program is making it possible for firefighters statewide to fulfill the academic requirements to be classified as fire science professionals. It's providing a seamless transition between the concentrated and rigorous 'classroom' instruction in fire science theory that is provided by Louisiana State University-Eunice, and the practical firefighter training offered at the Louisiana State Fire and Training Institute. The program provides better access to professional instruction, consistent with the Board of Regents' Master Plan, and, as a result, is producing better-prepared firefighters throughout the state.”

The DEI projects approved for 2002-2003 range from online delivery of chemistry laboratory courses to electronic distance education for rural sign language interpreters. For complete details of the 2002-2003 DEI grant awards, visit the Board of Regents website at <http://www.regents.state.la.us> and click on “What’s New.”